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MORPHINE

be chaffed, except by those who never do it but with flattering or affectionate purpose, pretend that they like it because they like the sort of man who does like it and would be glad to be thought to resemble him. A thousand others turn an East wind of hardly permissible ridicule at intervals upon their friends because they are under the impression that in doing so they prove their own humor. If we are right, the question why women are less touchy than men on the subject is solved. They are not looked down on—or only by their own sex—for want of mental hardihood. We think any man would rather live in the same house with a woman less humorous than himself than with one who was more so, just as he would rather marry a woman less courageous than himself than one who was more so. This is not, as cynics say, because he likes to excel. Every man desires to marry a woman better than himself, and that not in one

but in many particulars. Who would like to say to himself: "My wife's heart is harder than mine," or even "She has a better eye than I to the main chance"?

It is always a very difficult question to decide whether the instinct to hide or to display defects of character is less admirable. Where the modesty which hides does not partake of hypocrisy, we think it is more to be respected than a shameless display. Nevertheless, where humor is concerned the world would be more comfortable if those who have none could find it out and admit it. Unfortunately the only people who ever do declare their own poverty in this matter are people lacking in a sense of fun, and they lie to save their skins—at the expense of their souls, being determined not to advance out of the mental cover which they probably took upon leaving school, whatever their would-be playmates may think of them.

—*The Spectator, London.*

MORPHINE

By HUGH POLLARD

THE war had drawn together every type of man, with the result that the officers of the New Army were often curious folk who could not correspond with the set ideas of what an officer should be and think about. In the old Army brain was not a heresy, but speech showing that one could think of things beyond the scope of the average mess conversation was looked upon as bad form. An unconventional speculative idea, rashly uttered with intent to provoke argument, has been the secret bane of many a young officer's career. As a result, the Old Guard did not take over-kindly to the new blood, and many a reactionary old dug-out unconsciously served the Kaiser far better than he served his King.

The Brigade had suffered heavy losses in that quelling misery, the winter of 1914, and by the first flush of the spring we had drafts of new blood with us. We were resting in billets in a Belgian town not too far back behind the line, and some of the new officers had been talking rather cleverly. Not epoch-making stuff, you understand, but moderately intellectual argument—the talk of keen young men of modern days awake to the impulse of great new things.

These youngsters and most of their stamp and generation now lie dead, broken in health, or maimed, serving but as an object-lesson of the bitter futility of war. Sometimes I think that though we may have won, the cost we paid in these young

active brains was heavier than our leaders ever dreamed.

The Old Guard was represented in the mess by the Senior Captain, a solid, thick-headed Militia man and county gentleman, drawn from his Mendip Hills, and by the Doctor. The Doctor was the very type of old regular R.A.M.C. man, a capable administrator, an indifferent surgeon, and rigid as iron upon all points of discipline and etiquette. He presented a curious study in his mingling of the healer with the man-at-arms. He was not unsympathetic to the suffering; indeed, he had an almost Irish air of geniality, but this was crossed by a fierce dogmatism and a brusque belief that everything except a gaping wound was probably malingering. His contempt for the young civilian surgeons now in khaki knew no bounds, and the traditions of the Boer War were his stand-by. He refused to recognise that trench warfare in Flanders needed a different treatment from the practice of the high karoo.

Venning was one of the younger men, the new set who had just arrived. He was a good officer, knew his duty and did it well, but did not limit all his thought to matters of the kind. I remember his queer, rough-hewn face, keen blue eyes, and mobile mouth as he leant forward in the lithe circle of lamplight over the chequered red and white cloth of the cottage-table.

"I don't admit your argument, Lane," he was saying; "you seem to confuse the faculties of perception with the existence of a separate individual consciousness after death. Look here, I will illustrate my point. These faculties, these mystic perceptions, are in us you admit; you claim them to be proof of divinity. Now do you see this?"

He produced from his tunic-pocket a slender box and tumbled out upon the table two narrow tubes of amber glass

containing serried tabloids set like peas within a pod.

"These are morphine, a wonderful and patent magic. Place two of these beneath your tongue—or, better still, a prick of a needle and a swift injection—and they will open to you a wide new world of beauty, fantasy, and dream. Now there is no essence of divinity in these white drugs. I simply claim that it releases the faculties, the natural faculties inherent in you. You put no more spirituality into the body, but"—here his voice lowered to an almost reminiscent cadence—"you see a new side of life."

The Doctor had been examining one of the tubes. "Have you ever taken morphine?" he asked abruptly.

Venning answered him as an aside, evidently wishing to press the point of his argument against his antagonist:

"Poppies, mandragora, and all the drowsy syrups of the world I know, and love their bitter savour."

Ever after that the Doctor watched Venning as a cat watches a mouse. Was Venning's mood brilliant, the Doctor put it down to drugs; was he depressed, it was the obvious reaction. I knew nothing of what was passing in the Doctor's mind at the time. He was not a communicative man. Sometimes his nephew Eugene, also an officer of the New Army, would come over from the Rifle Brigade to mess with his uncle, and he confided to me, as one of the old Territorial officers who stood next to the Regulars themselves in vested traditions, that his uncle was highly dubious of Kitchener's mob.

We went back into the line for a spell or so, and then the Staff thought the time meet and fit for a tentative push at the Boches' line. We went over the parapet and got about ten yards ahead of the Rifles, who were on our left flank. After a sharp bit of bayonet work we were

ONE LITTLE HOUR

through the first line and into the orchard, where we were all mixed up, Germans firing from everywhere. Our men and the Rifles did all they could, and by and by I was bowled over with a bullet in the leg. The men got me down to a dressing station, which was already full, and I found the Doctor working like blazes amid the hell.

By and by Venning stalked in, with a badly smashed shoulder. He was pretty far gone.

"They have pushed us out of the orchard again," he said. "Hello, Doctor! Poor Eugene has got it bad."

"Eh? You have seen the boy?" said the Doctor.

"Shell or something in the lower part of the body—poor devil! They daren't shift him without a stretcher."

"Blast it! I can't leave here."

"It's no good, I am afraid," said Venning, softly; "it looked hopeless. I did what I could—gave him my morphine."

A torrent of curses from the Doctor stopped him, and we all gazed amazed at the man, his face grey with emotion and

his fingers tearing madly at a dressing. Quite suddenly he stopped. "There is nothing to be done, nothing at all," he said, and went on with his work.

We went back to hospital in England together, Venning and I, and I thought little more of the incident except to wonder how the boy's fate had moved the iron-disciplined old Doc. It was months later that I found out from a man who had been his servant that he had played a trick on Venning, a harsh but well-meant trick to save Venning from what he believed to be his vice.

"Yes, sir," said the man. "He changed Mr. Venning's morphia for something else like morphia—aper morphia, I think he said it was."

"Apo-morphia," I thought. Good God! the most powerful emetic that there is. Then the sheer horror of the moment broke upon me—poor young Eugene lying there, his body torn in agony, then apo-morphia given in all good faith by tender-hearted Venning, meaning to ease his pain. My God, what a death!

—*English Review.*

ONE LITTLE HOUR

By Leslie Coulson, killed in action

Our little hour—how swift it flies
When poppies flare and lilies smile;
How soon the fleeting minute dies,
Leaving us but a little while
To dream our dream, to sing our song
To pick the fruit, to pluck the flower,
The Gods—they do not give us long—
One little hour.

Our little hour—how short it is
When Love with dew-eyed loveliness
Raises her lips for ours to kiss
And dies within our first caress.
Youth flickers out like windblown flame,
Sweets of to-day to-morrow sour,
For Time and Death, relentless, claim
One little hour.

Our little hour—how short a time
To wage our wars, to fan our fates,
To take our fill of armored crime,
To troop our banner, storm the gates.
Blood on the sword, our eyes blood-red,
Blind in our puny reign of power,
Do we forget how soon is sped
One little hour?

Our little hour—how soon it dies;
How short a time to tell our beads,
To chant our feeble Litanies,
To think sweet thoughts, to do good deeds,
The altar lights grow pale and dim,
The bells hang silent in the tower,
So passes with the dying hymn,
Our little hour.—From "Over There," Scribner's.